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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE ON THE CHINESE WEB

REF: A. BEIJING 01770  
[B](#). BEIJING 1928  
[C](#). BEIJING 02005

#### Summary

[1](#). (SBU) Searches for online discussion of religion on the Chinese Internet from June to August revealed a robust discourse on religious doctrine and practice on Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist websites, discussion forums, and blogs as well as on mainstream commercial portals. Chinese religious sites varied in appearance, willingness to include discussion of political topics and links to other sites. Chinese Christian portals and websites had large numbers of hits and postings and were observed to be used for networking and proselytizing, but political content was noticeably absent. Chinese-language Islamic sites mostly focused on cultural and religious discussions among Hui Muslims and often featured scholarly discussions of scriptural or cultural topics. Islamic sites also were observed to include limited discussion of select political issues, including the influence of the July riots in Xinjiang on the perception of Muslims in China. However, many websites that had hosted material on Islam had been censored after the riots. Buddhist websites we observed included a variety of Buddhist sects. They did not appear to be as interconnected as Christian or Muslim sites. Some had clear ties to foreign organizations. Buddhist websites concentrated on Buddhist doctrine, religious practices and scriptures. These sites made little mention of the Dalai Lama, except for political or personal criticism that often echoed Chinese government propaganda. The pedigree of "pro-government" postings and comments is difficult to determine, because the Communist Party is known to compensate web users who write such content. End Summary.

#### Christian Websites: Social Networking and Proselytizing

[1](#)2. (SBU) Christian portals and websites on the Chinese Internet claimed a large readership and provided social networking functions. Based on website content and blog/blog comment postings, it appears that Chinese Christian netizens use the Internet to network and proselytize. Searches for "Christian Websites" in Chinese on Baidu.cn, China's most popular search engine, and Google.cn, returned over 1.6 and 4.9 million results respectively (Note: Search engine results are a notoriously inexact measure of Internet usage, however we provide the data here to give a general idea of the amount of religious content online. End Note). PolOff was able to access hundreds of relevant links and portals through normal filtered Chinese Internet providers. The majority of sites visited by PolOff were registered in the Shanghai region, including 52jidunet.com and ccctspm.org. Christianity was discussed on mainstream commercial Chinese sites as well. Baidu Q&A (zhidao.baidu.cn) services noted at least 52,000

questions related to the word "Christianity" from 2003 to August 2009, and Tieba.Baidu.cn listed over a million similar postings over the same period. The government-approved "Three Self Movement" Protestant Church was represented in a portion of sites, but most sites did not refer to the "Three Self" congregations. (Note: The "Three Self Movement" Protestant Church is one of the five officially recognized religions in China. End Note.) Some Christian sites claimed to have a high volume of page views, with one site (ccctspm.org) claiming over 4.9 million views from 2001 to July 2009, another (zhsw.org) recorded over 6.24 million views from 2005 to August 2009. Many individual blogs linked from portals like 172god.cn recorded tens of thousands of hits, and some chatrooms and forums received hundreds of postings on a daily basis throughout July.

13. (SBU) Chat room discussions ranged from testimonies and stories of personal religious experience to advice on parenting and marriage. Portals such as God123.cn and Jidunet.cn were replete with links to individual church websites, blogs, chat rooms, and RSS feeds. Similarly, religious resources, sermons, online Bibles of various translations (Good News Translation, New Revised Standard Version), Christian bookstores, news sources, and seminaries in China were openly available. PolOff observed Christian music downloads available on the majority of sites. Portal sites like God123.cn also contained links to foreign Chinese-language Christian networks in Hong Kong (gnci.org.hk), Taiwan, the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere which PolOff was able to access directly from a Chinese Internet cafe. On these sites, PolOff observed Chinese netizens using social networking functions and chat

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rooms to arrange social functions, basketball tournaments and bible study sessions.

14. (SBU) Netizens on the majority of Christian websites visited by PolOff openly encouraged others to proselytize, bring friends to church, and discuss religion. One blog, manboli.ccblog.net, reposted a letter that his house church had distributed to the neighborhood inviting them to church. One supportive netizen commented, "if we do not proselytize, it will bring us misfortune." Jidujiao.cn, a portal site registered in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, contained encouragements to "share this with friends" on their main page. This website also appeared to have overt support from non-Chinese sources based on the names listed on its donation page.

15. (SBU) Political discourse was noticeably absent from the Christian sites. One forum overtly encouraged self censorship and cautioned users not to post political or pornographic material. The site included a 24-hour phone number to call to report such posts. Reached by email, the webmaster for this site told PolOff the warning was put on the website by the webhost. The forum was "unwilling to have contact with people touching on politics," he said. Chinafuyin.cn posted a similar note urging self censorship. Various forums did make note of government efforts to shut down Christian sites, in one case suggesting that a censored site should "find another location" to avoid censorship. Some posts speculated that one reason for the censorship of Christian sites was that the government had "gone overboard" in its efforts to restrain Muslim sites, and Christian sites had been caught up in those efforts.

Focus on Hui Muslims, Theological and Political Issues

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16. (SBU) Searches for websites on Islam resulted in a large number of websites aimed at Chinese Hui Muslims. Of the sites PolOff visited, approximately half of the formerly active links to additional Muslim sites were blocked, suggesting recent efforts to censor sites with Muslim content. (Note: Searches for Falun Gong revealed the same

pattern. The few sites that were accessible were critical of Falun Gong. End Note.) Searches on Baidu.cn for Islam-related postings (tieba.baidu.cn) were completely blocked when searched on August 11, but Baidu's Q&A section (zhidao.baidu.cn) about Islam returned over 13,000 posts. Portals like islamcn.net, 2muslim.com, and yich.org (over 3.1 million hits from 2004 to August 2009) contained links and connections to other domestic Islamic sites. Most Islamic sites we visited were registered in Beijing or in western provinces.

¶17. (SBU) In contrast to many of the Christian websites, many Hui websites we observed, including China774.cn, appeared, based on their design, to have been designed by professionals. China774.cn was owned and run partly by an internet design company (Johaa.com) that produced sites in Chinese and Arabic. Advertisements on many of the sites offered Halal food, travel packages, study abroad packages, wedding photography, and Arabic lessons. Almost all portals contained a simple explanation and introduction to Islam.

¶18. (SBU) Articles from scholarly journals on Islam, such as Arab World Studies, were broadly posted and linked. On several Muslim forums PolOff found discussions of political issues such as the impact of the early July unrest in Xinjiang on perceptions of Islam by non-Muslim Chinese, in addition to many discussions on scripture and culture. However, PolOff searches during the period of the unrest found little mention of Uighurs on these forums. (Ref A) Additionally, a popular Uighur forum, uighurbiz.net has been blocked in China since the Urumqi riots (Refs A, B, C). Bulletin Board Services (BBS) such as Islamcn.net claimed high viewership with some popular posts recording tens of thousands of views in July.

#### Diverse Buddhist Sects, Links to Taiwan and Outside

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¶19. (SBU) PolOff was able to access Chinese websites belonging to a variety of Buddhist sects through searches on Baidu.cn and Google.cn, which turned up over 5.9 million and 53 million results respectively. Similar to the Christian websites that PolOff visited, doctrinal issues were discussed openly on mainstream commercial Chinese sites. Sites dedicated to discussion of Buddhist beliefs were registered in many regions throughout the country. Regardless of affiliation, many sites (fjnet.com, fjlt.net, bbs.zgft.cn)

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made reference to the World Buddhist Forum, an international forum held every few years in China and attended by over 1000 monks from 50 participating countries, held most recently in Jiangsu Province in March 2009. Many websites, including fjnet.com and fjdh.com linked openly to sites hosted outside of mainland China including some hosted in Taiwan. These sites were accessible through Chinese Internet providers. Most sites we visited focused primarily on doctrine, Buddhist practices and study of Buddhist scriptures.

¶10. (SBU) Searches for Buddhist sites revealed a large number of websites featuring prominent inclusion of familiar Chinese government propaganda on Chinese culture, economy, and environmental issues. Buddhist sites such as zcfj.fjnet.com and Tibet.cn, both registered in Beijing, included pictures of monks smiling as they met local officials. Christian and Islamic sites were not observed to include similar material.

¶11. (SBU) Chinese sites related to Tibetan Buddhism made little mention of the Dalai Lama. Many included government and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) accounts of Tibetan culture and religious beliefs. Baidu.cn and Google.cn searches for Tibetan Buddhism or Dalai Lama were dominated by republication of articles from official media expounding official policy on Tibet and the Dalai Lama. The content of one site, Tibet328.cn, the "Tibet Human Rights Website," launched in March 2009 on the "50th anniversary of democratic

reforms in Tibet and the liberation of the serfs," was particularly noteworthy as thinly disguised government propaganda, including discussion of the role of the CCP in protecting human rights in Tibet.

¶12. (SBU) An August 11 discussion on Tibet328.cn included commentary critical of the Dalai Lama's recent comments in support of Xinjiang activist Rebiya Kadeer; the site also contained many reposted Xinhua news articles condemning the Dalai Lama. Essays critical of the Dalai Lama were reposted on several Buddhist sites including tibetbuddhism.org, and individual blogs such as blog163.com/jujunjun. One such article was a critique of the Dalai Lama's statement that his successor would be determined by popular election. An article by the Deputy Director of the Tibet Autonomous Region Standing Committee added, "Dalai caters to western sentiments, he wears the robes and appearance of religion, but to be blunt he has political motives." Another article from blog163.com/jujunjun was entitled "Dalai from an early stage was never fit to be a real Buddhist." Note: the Chinese Communist Party compensates some bloggers and comment-posters for pro-government, pro-Party comments and posts. The existence of these paid content generators, dubbed in Chinese the "fifty cent party" for the price they are paid per pro-government post, makes it difficult to assess the authenticity of pro-government opinions expressed on the Chinese Internet.

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